# A Validation Study on Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland

Simon Hugi and Ben Jann

University of Bern, ben.jann@soz.unibe.ch

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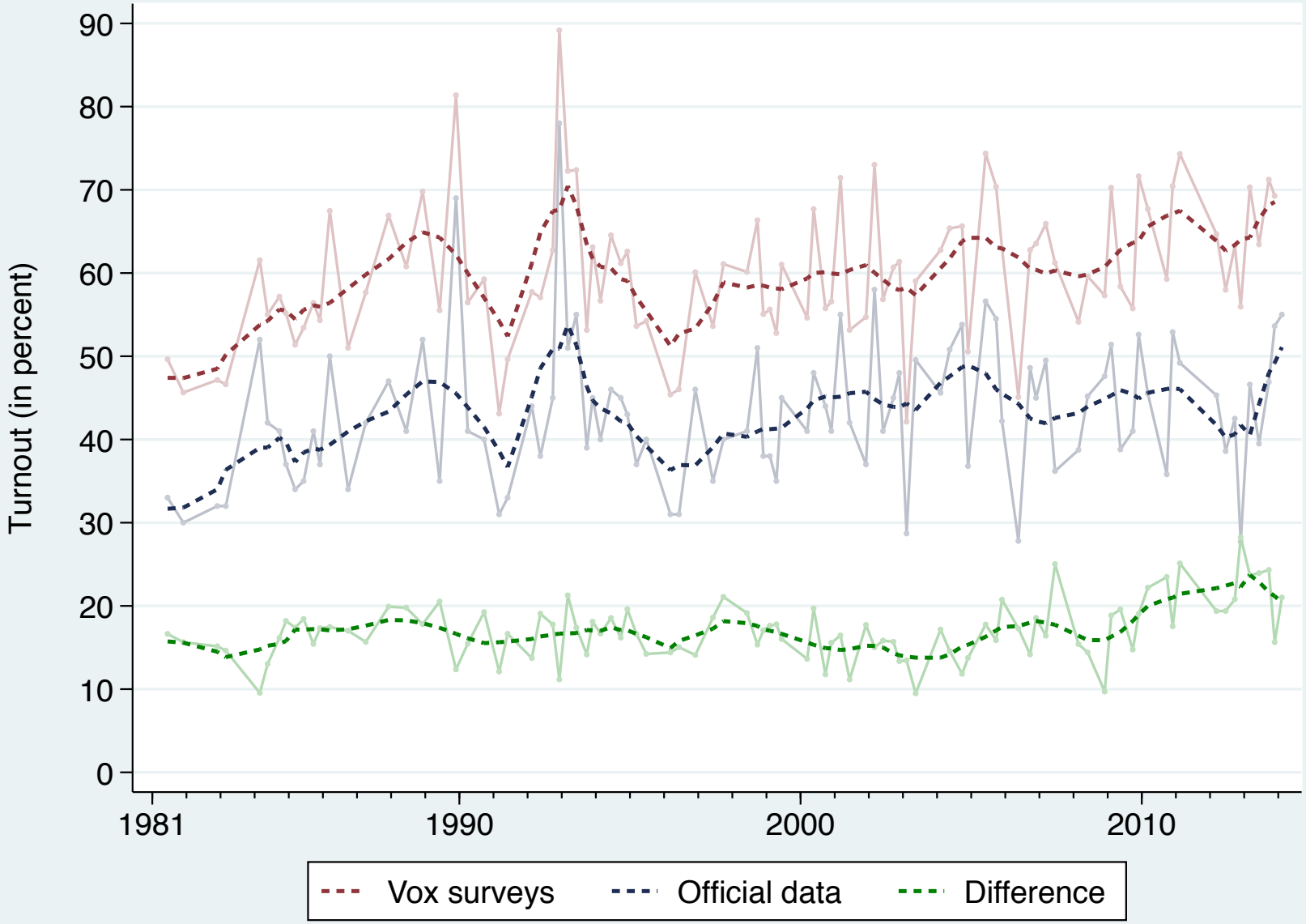
# Outline

- Introduction
- Our study
- Results
- Conclusions

# Introduction: Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland




Source: Own calculations based on the most recent VOX dataset.

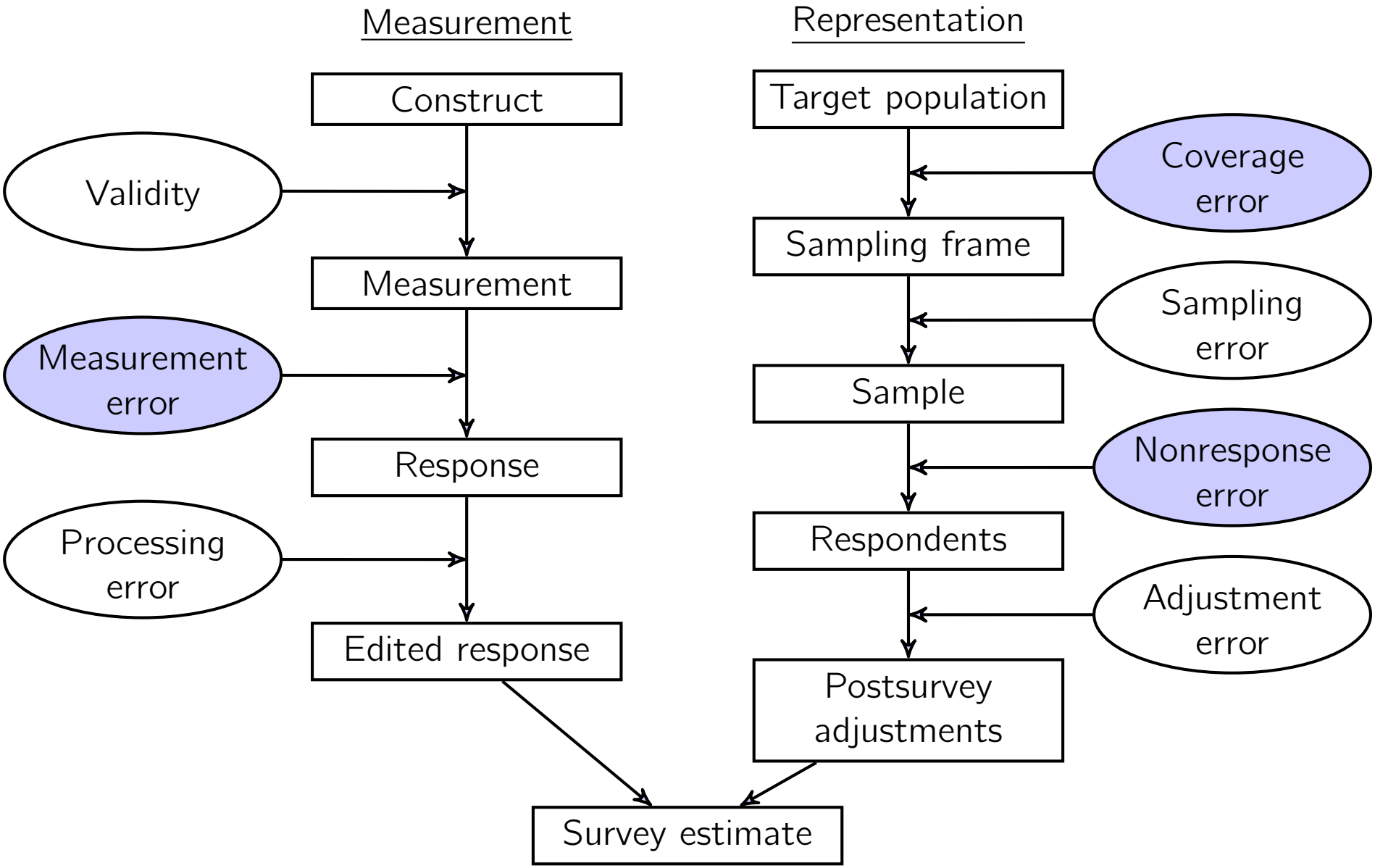
# Introduction: Research Questions

- What are the mechanisms that lead to the observed turnout bias in Swiss voting and election studies?
- How much do the different mechanisms contribute to the total bias?
- Is it possible to reduce the bias by special questioning techniques or weighting schemes?

# Introduction: Types of Biases

- **Undercoverage**
  - Sampling frames typically do not cover the whole population.
  - Political participation is likely to be lower among uncovered subpopulations (e.g. young people without landline) than among covered subpopulation, leading to a positive bias in survey estimates of voter turnout (Mokrzycki, Keeter und Kennedy 2009, Blumberg und Luke 2007)
- **Nonresponse**
  - Participation in surveys correlates with political interest and political participation (Voogt und Saris 2003, Jackman 1999, Brehm 1993).
- **Misreporting**
  - Due to social desirability (Tourangeau und Yan 2007) and recall errors (Belli et al. 1999), respondents tend to overreport their participation behavior.

# Introduction: Types of Biases

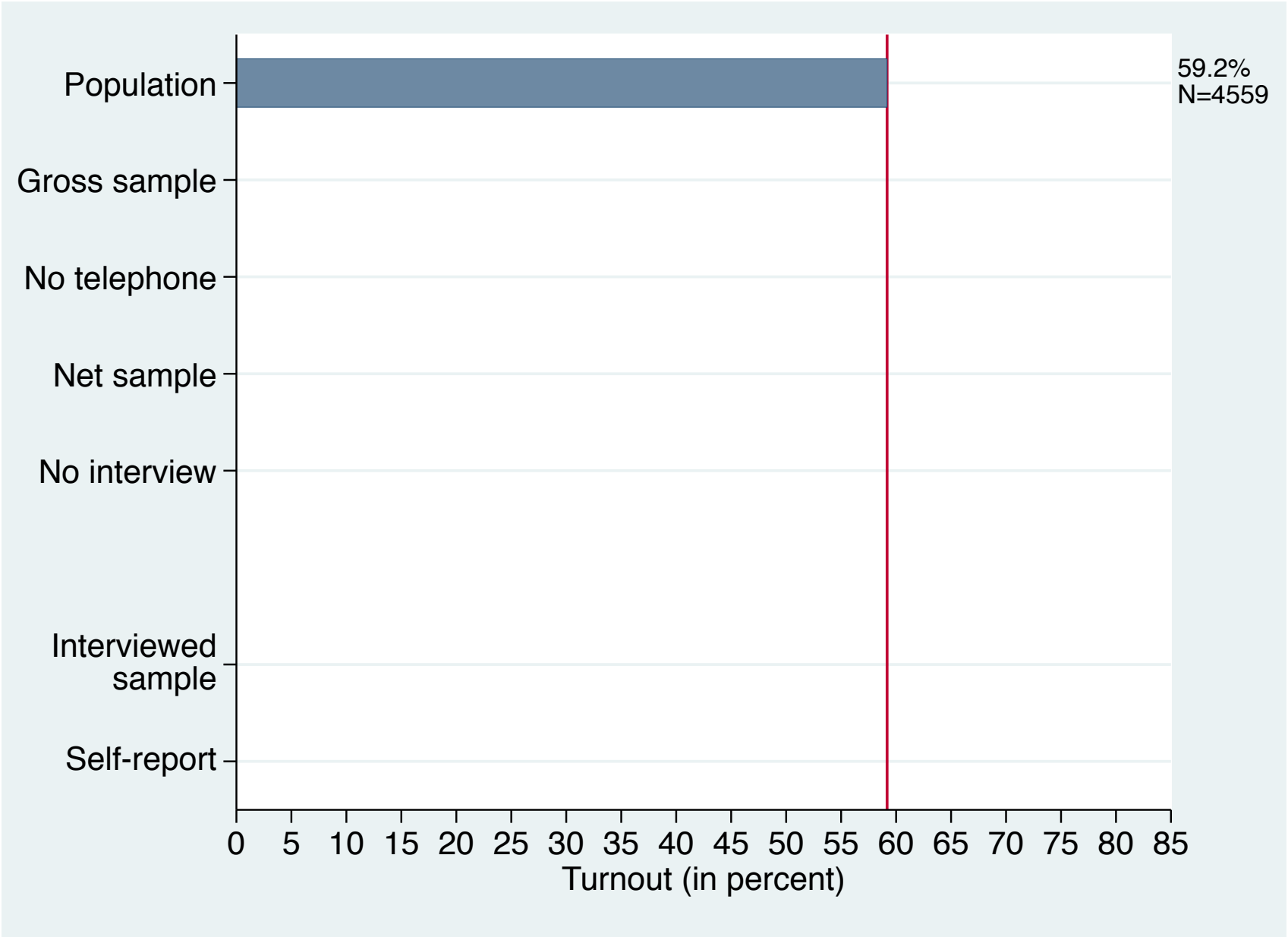



(Groves et al. 2009:48)

# Our Study

- Voter turnout validation study comparing survey data to registered polling cards at a small municipality in Switzerland.
- Polling cards
  - Federal vote of September 22, 2013.
  - Citizens who took part in the vote can be identified from the collected polling cards.
- Survey
  - Gross sample of 2000 citizens from the municipality's register.
  - Net sample of 1696 (84.8%) citizens whose households could be found in the telephone register.
  - CATI survey between September 23 and October 20 with 893 respondents (52.7% of net sample).
  - Questions on: political interest, participation in the September 22 vote and other votes, social desirability of voting, key indicators of political participation research, social demographics.
  - Wording experiment for the September 22 voting question.

# Main Results



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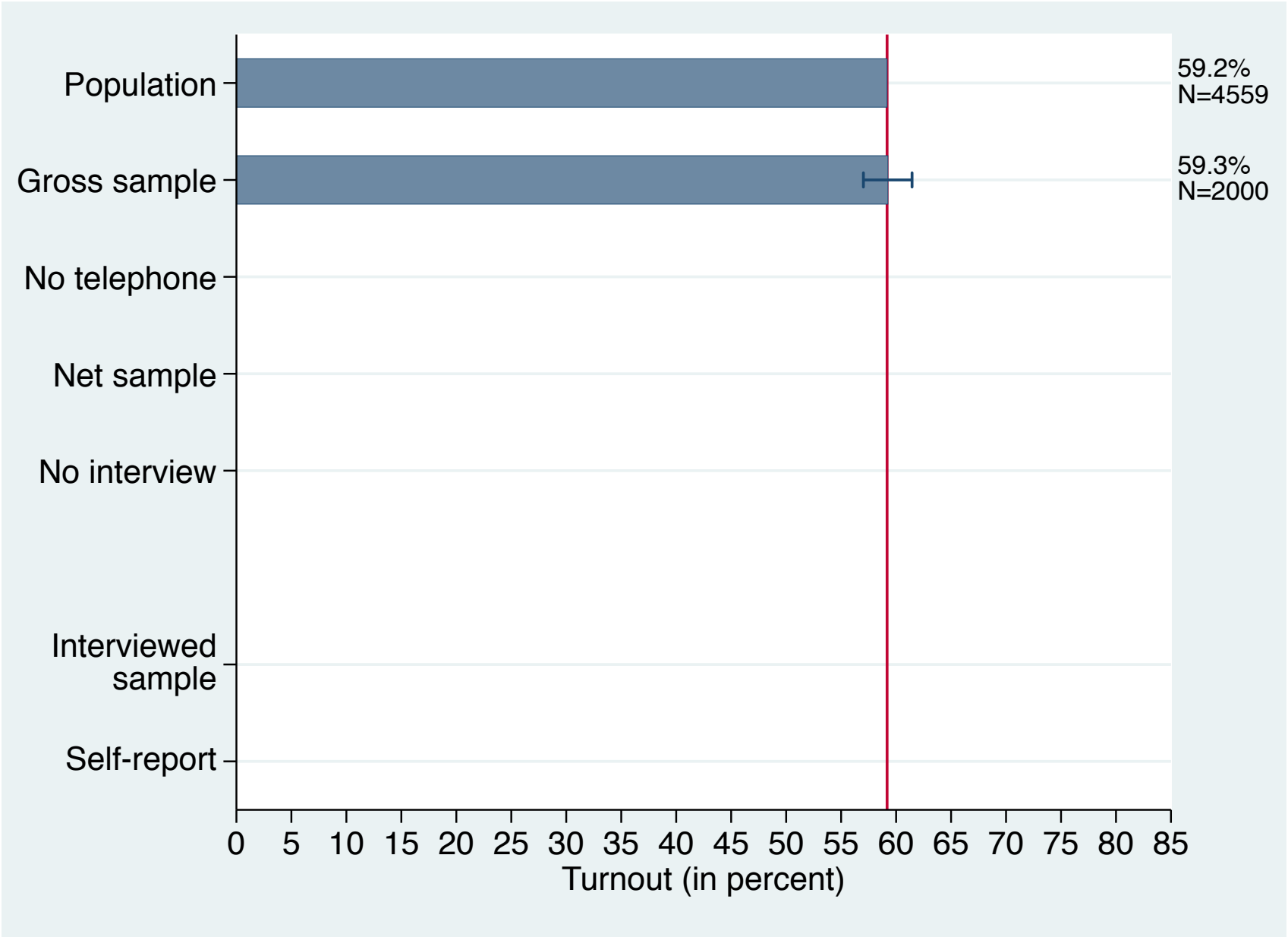

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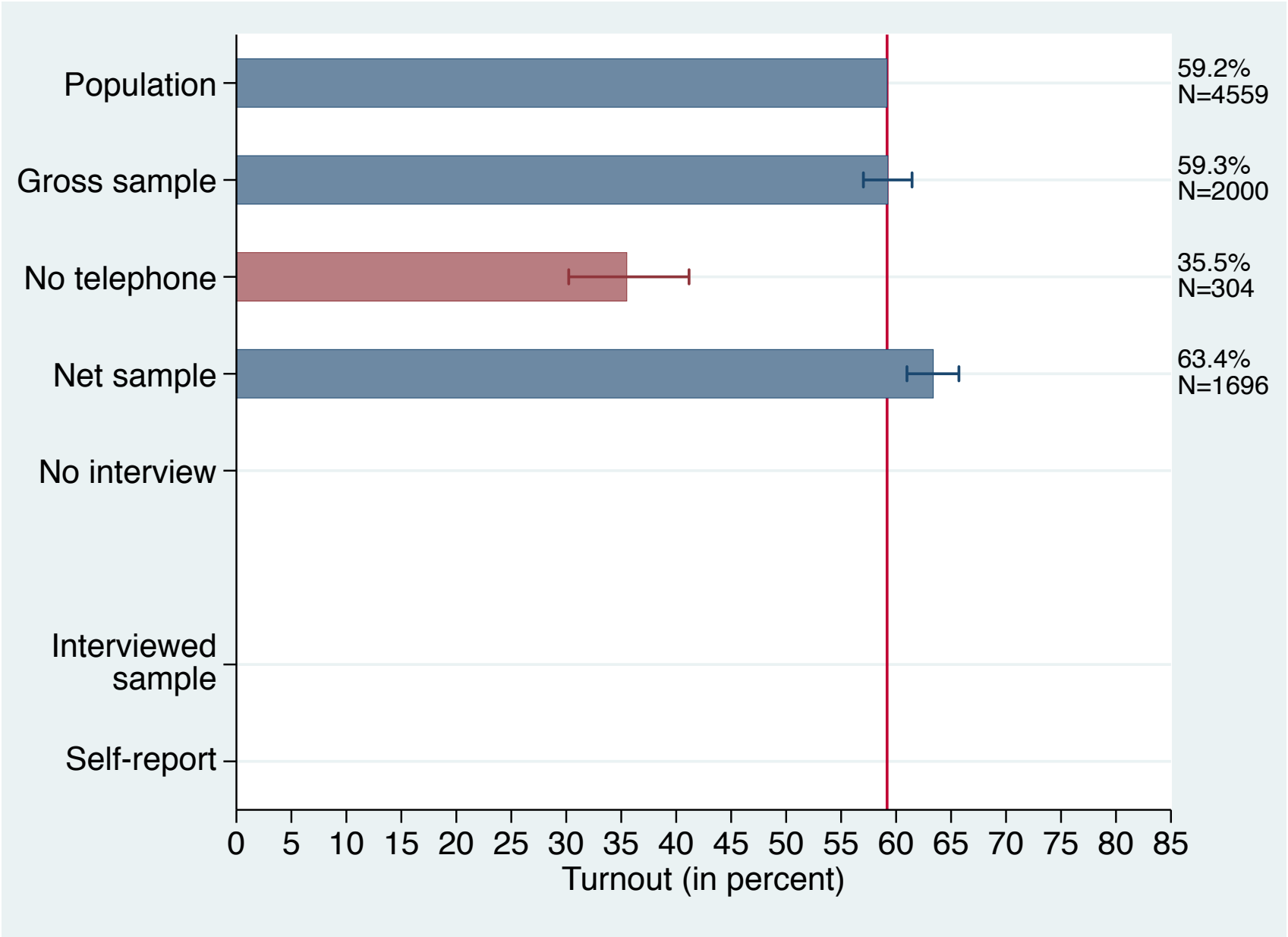

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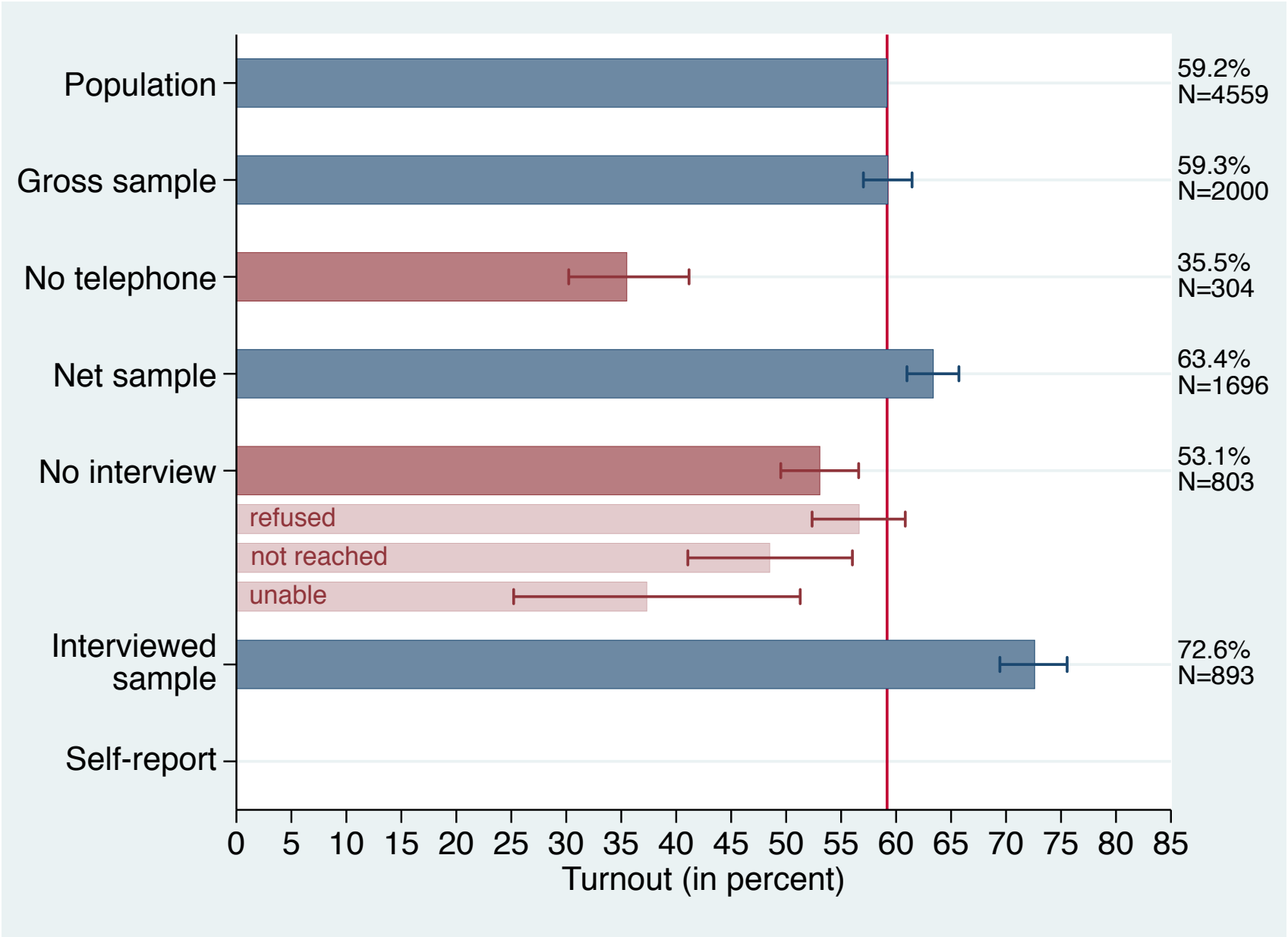

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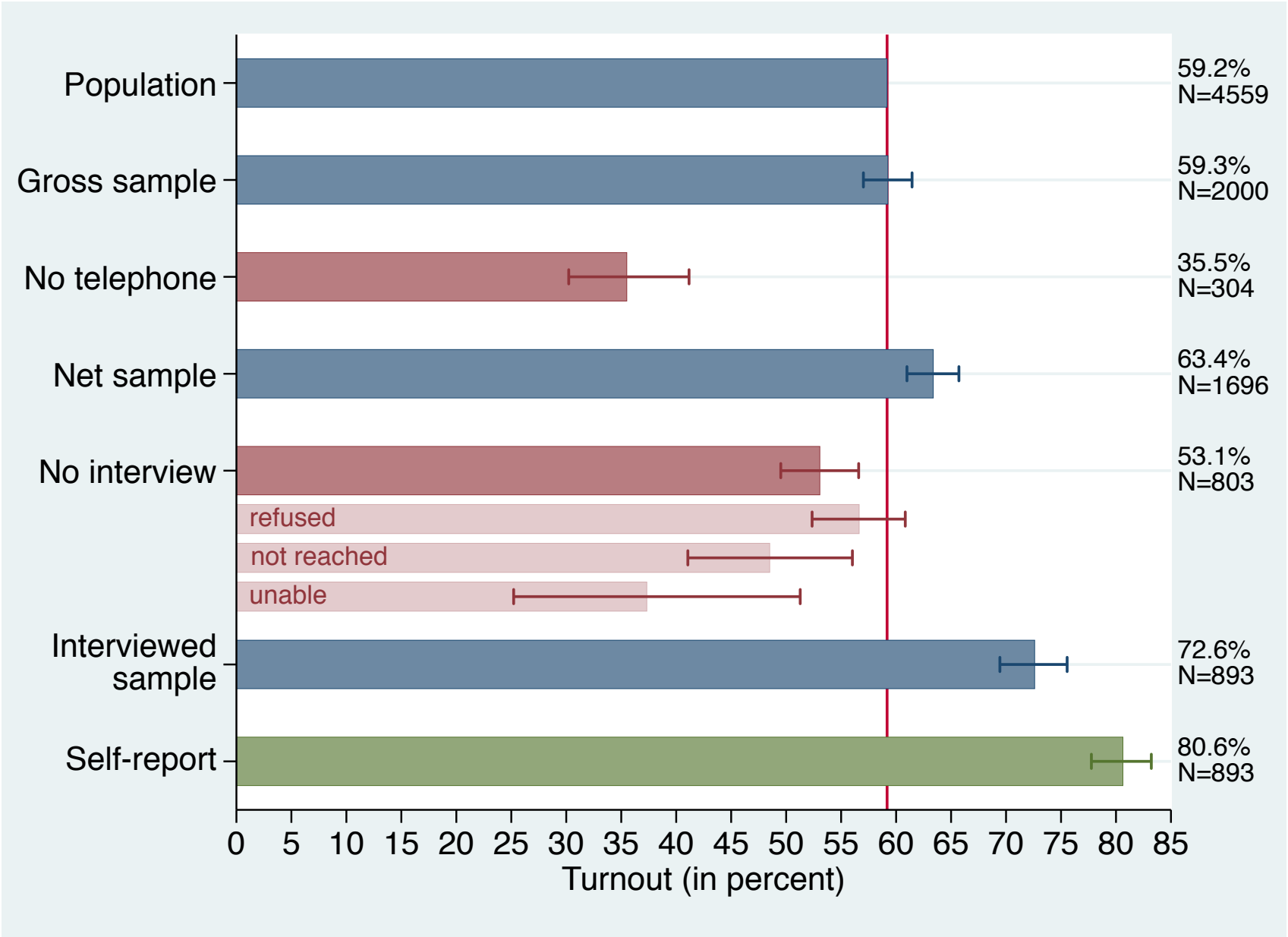
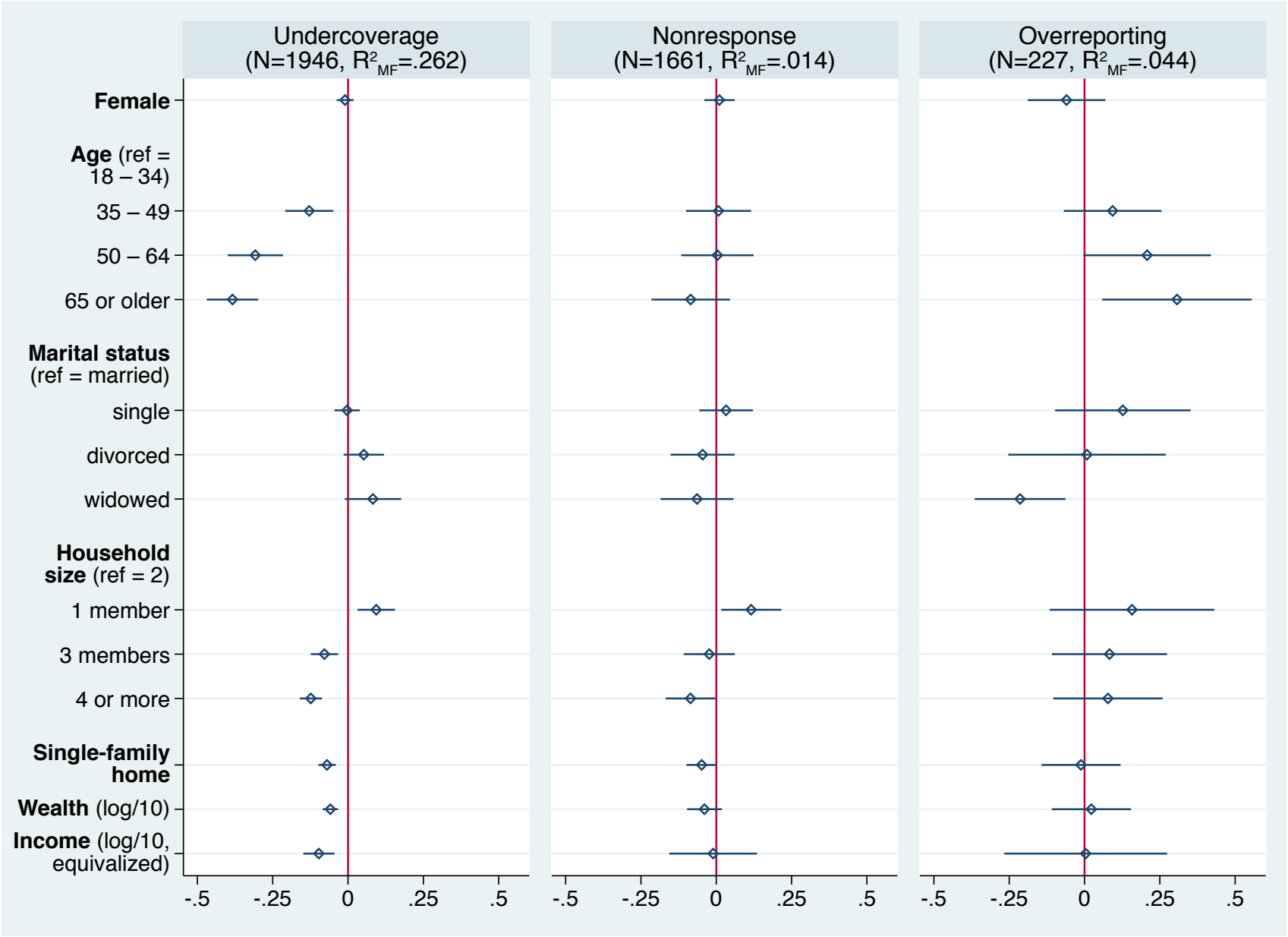


# Over- and Underreporting

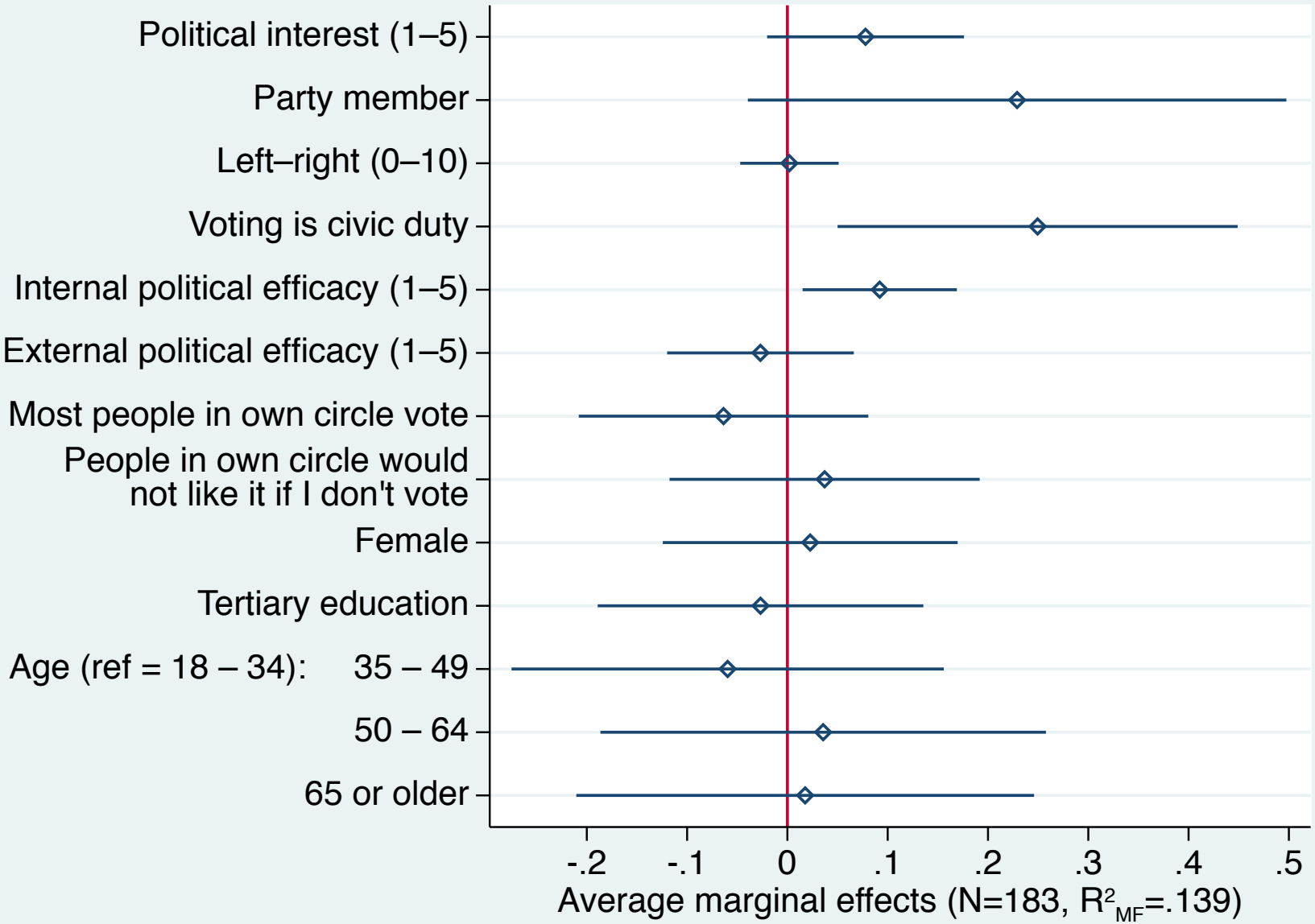
| | self-report | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | did not vote | voted | Total |
| polling cards | | | |
| – did not vote | 69.6 | **30.4** | 100.0 |
| – voted | **0.4** | 99.6 | 100.0 |
| | | | (N = 893) |

# Sociodemographic Profiles




Average marginal effects from logistic regressions

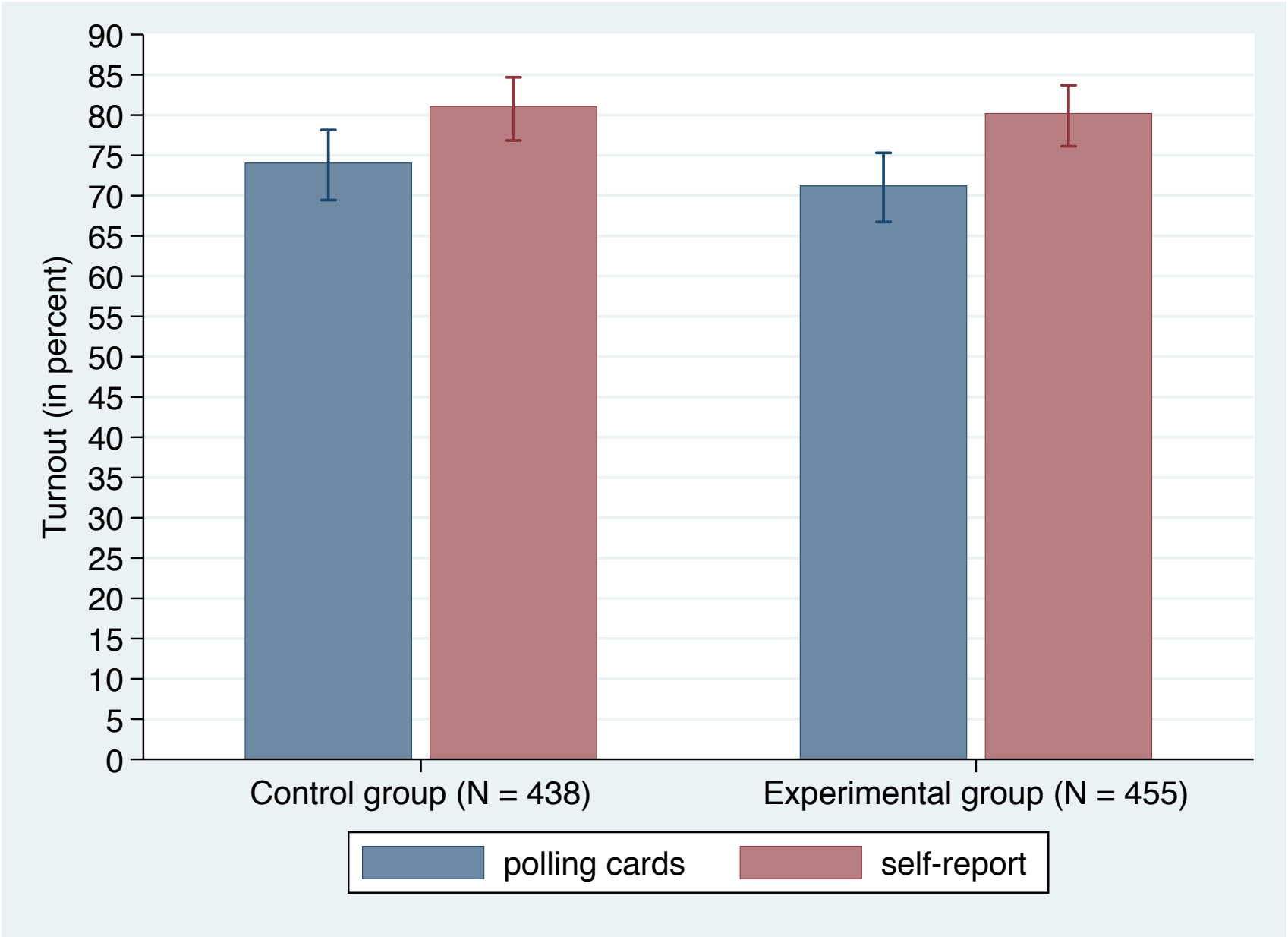
# Determinants of Overreporting



# Wording Experiment

- The sample was randomized into a control group and a treatment group.
- The control group received a standard voting question.
  - „How about you, did you vote or not?“
- The treatment group received a modified voting question intended to minimize social-desirability bias and recall errors.
  - „Please try to remember whether you read the voting documents and whether you voted in person or by mail. Which of the following statements does apply to you?“
    - ★ I did not vote.
    - ★ I thought about voting, but did not.
    - ★ I usually vote, but did not this time.
    - ★ I am sure I did vote.

# Wording Experiment: Results



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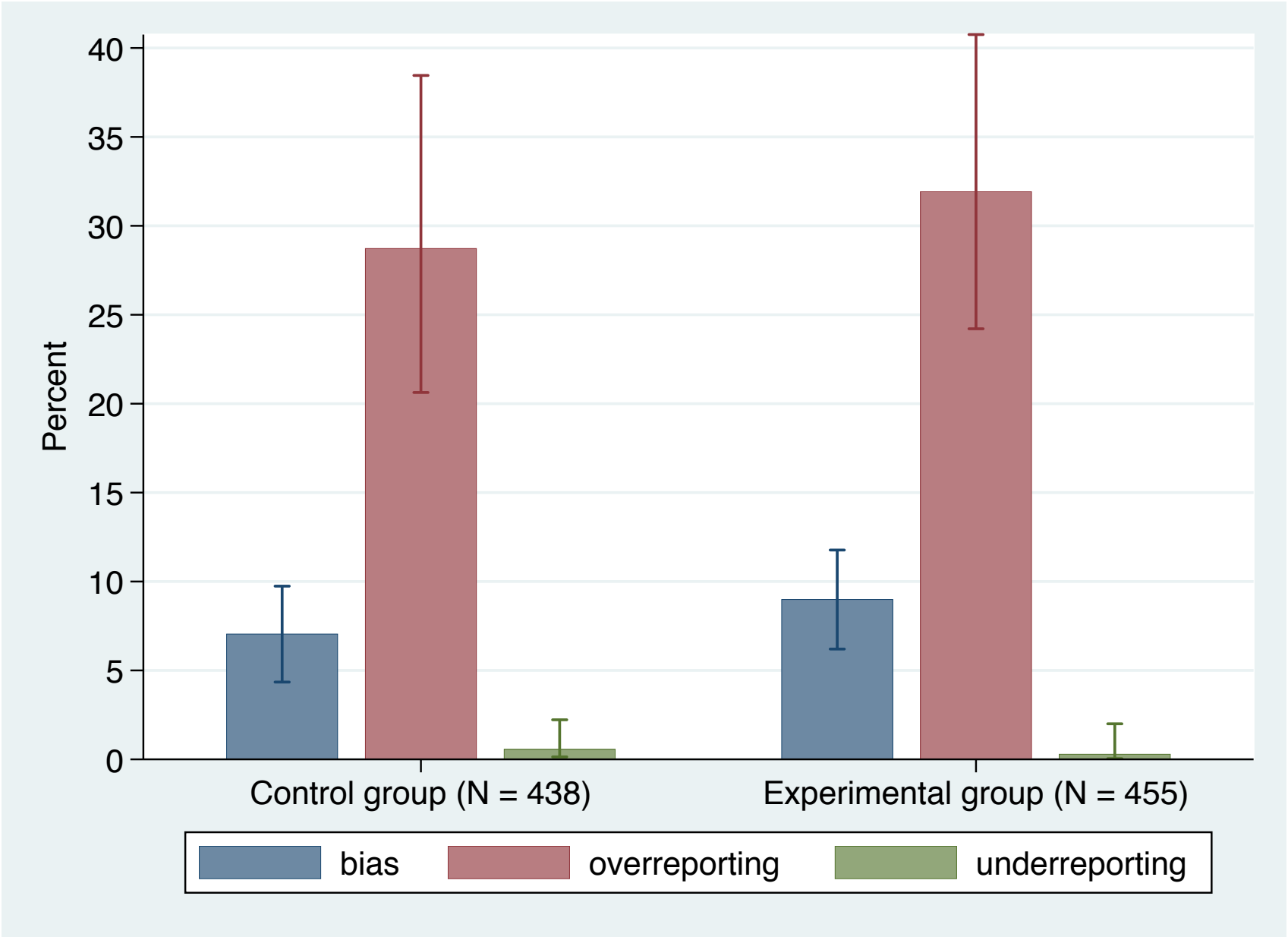

# Summary and Conclusions

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting jointly contribute to the participation bias in survey data

| | |
|---|---|
| Sampling error | 0.4% |
| Undercoverage | 19.2% |
| Nonresponse | 43.0% |
| Overreporting | 37.4% |
| Total bias (21.5 pp) | 100.0% |

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting have differential sociodemographic profiles.
- The errors potentially affect associations and regression models estimated from survey data. Overreporting appears particularly problematic.
- Effort should be put into improving survey measurements of political participation and new correction methods should be developed.
- However: Surveys will always remain an approximate science.

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